

Editorial: Towards a psychomusicology

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This special edition draws together a selection of musical perspectives. I hope it demonstrates how music in its varying forms and styles, and the myriad of intersecting ways in which we engage with it, can have great therapeutic value in our lives.

Psychomusicology

The term 'Psychomusicology' was brought to prominence by Laske (1975:276) who wrote:

'Psychomusicology brings together the theoretical and empirical tools of both psychology and musicology to study the mental processes underlying the acquisition and the use of music. This field is thus truly interdisciplinary'.

It appears that much of the current discourse on what might be termed psychomusicology is coming from an objectivist or natural science perspective, even focussing on the realms of neuroscience and the brain (American Psychological Association, 2021). Carlsen (Carlsen and Laske, 1985), however, argued that ownership over the compound word 'psychomusicology' was unnecessary. Drawing on the original interdisciplinary focus of Laske's (1975) statement, and coming from a subjectivist and interpretivist perspective,

I propose a broader understanding of what psychomusicology could mean for the field of counselling and psychotherapy today.

Musicology meets psychology through meaning making

Musicology can be broadly defined as ‘the scholarly study of music’ (Randall, 1986:520). From a subjective musicological stance, Kramer (2002) states that meaning is a central factor with music, as it is embedded in our life conditions and thought. He wrote that music is ‘integrated with, not remote from, the general atmosphere of meaning in which daily life is lived’ (Kramer, 2003: 9). This aligns with a phenomenological approach to psychology which explores the interpretation of the meaning of our lived experiences and the objects we perceive (Spinelli, 2005). Dorothy Rowe (2020:42) said, ‘meaning is our being’ and so a psychomusicological perspective may then simply take a musical view to help us to navigate, and make sense of, the world around us. Working integratively, any number of theoretical lenses could then be applied to this from, for instance, the worlds of psychology, musicology, pedagogy and social science.

One way of doing this is through developing our biographical understandings of music. Biographical understandings are important as they can locate an individual within a broader collective and social context, whilst highlighting the meaning people make in their lives (Merrill & West, 2019). Spruce (2012), drawing on the ideas of Freire (1970) and coming from a music education perspective, suggests that being aware of our musical biographies can help us to realise our own musical consciousness. We can then gain a greater awareness of how music relates to and reflects our lived lives and world views. This is perhaps useful for therapists too as we engage with people and their lived experiences of music.

Emily Fozard in this issue, for example, discusses the meaning Bruce Springsteen has within her life. She describes her relationship with him and his music as a therapeutic process, exploring it in part through the lens of Carl Roger’s humanist psychology. In a different way, Marco Bellasi draws on the existential philosophy of Kierkegaard and discusses how the opera *Don Giovanni* is connected to the political and social contexts of Mozart’s time.

Embodiment and Awareness

In this issue, Karin Greenhead explores the importance of bodily awareness through Dalcroze Eurythmics. Karin (using the term mindful bodies rather than embodiment), discusses how working with Dalcroze-inspired movements can help to develop a sense of agency and freedom for musicians. From a different perspective, Andrea Hughes discusses the Alexander Technique and how bodily awareness has helped her to develop a sense of autonomy and a non-judgemental approach to self. In a similar vein, John Finney says that all musical educational encounters should ‘promote feelingful bodily

involvement', emphasising the importance of the integration of the body with music. From a psychotherapeutic perspective having a corporeal element could refer to Gendlin and the felt sense as discussed by William West which can be an important source of insight.

As a teacher of music, I remember students would carry their instruments around or keep their drumsticks in their pockets. Our attachments and relationships with instruments can be important to our sense of selves and relating.

Improvisation and culture

From a cultural perspective, music has formed a part of my dual heritage (English/Turkish) identity. Growing up, I was inspired by my dad's Turkish music collection. The musical soundscape of Turkey was so different to the UK with its asymmetric metres, tonalities, forms and instruments. Turkey had a rhythm that the UK did not have.

Pedagogy and schools

In schools, music can provide a non-judgmental meeting point where students are able to engage with learning whilst sometimes overcoming adverse barriers to education. The music can help form the connection or bridge between teacher and student. Music can lend itself to very student-centred ways of working and by making musical decisions and choices they can perhaps develop what Rogers (1969) may call their inner locus of evaluation to do this. It can help foster a sense of agency and a way to express whatever they may be experiencing.

Ian P. Levy et al. (this issue), explore a hip-hop based approach using what they term a 'hip-hop development framework' (HHD). Drawing on what they call reality pedagogy and standing in opposition to pathologizing counselling models (and schools as centres of pathology), they use hip-hop based approaches to reach Black and Brown, and marginalized youths to help cultivate self-awareness and self-actualisation.

Karin Greenhead explores the awakening potential of a flexible approach to teaching through Dalcroze Eurythmics. John Finney proposes eight points for pedagogy, similarly perhaps, calling for 'fluid and flexible conceptualisations that could be applied to ongoing musical experience', suggesting we avoid objectivist taxonomies with pre-determined outcomes. As Judith Weir suggests, within education there is a focus on so called 'facts' and metrics don't readily cover music.

Community

As William West states, our shared experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the importance of our relationships and sense of community. Judith Weir talks of the power of the communal experience and the companionship music can provide us with. This is echoed in the Sufi musical practices explored by Gulcin Bulut. Emily Fozard's article describes another sense of community or connection she felt with the characters of Springsteen's

songs. However it works, music can connect us and can challenge the prevailing social hyper-individualism that William West discusses.

Coda

From a counselling and psychotherapy position, a psychomusicological or psychomusical perspective is important in the work we do. A greater awareness of this may be helpful for the people we see. We do not necessarily need to be music specialists to adopt this approach. The insights of musicians, composers and music educators are needed in the counselling world.

These themes reflect just a few of the multifaceted and diverse ways music can work in our lives. It seems there are some commonalities too, across these perspectives. Music is an embodied activity and can help integrate aspects of ourselves - our minds, bodies, and spirit. It can connect us to each other and to the wider world. The instruments we play can have a big significance to us. Music can tap into improvised and tacit aspects of ourselves and goes beyond language. It is a part of our cultural expression and experiencing.

Music accompanies us throughout our biographies and the life course. It is there for key events as well as the day-to day. It can help us to navigate difficulties, process trauma, access our spiritual resources, explore identity, celebrate, grieve, worship, communicate, connect, earn money, exercise, have fun and so much more. As Frank Zappa said, 'Music is the best'.

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